



Ha'Bon Handmade in Aruba

by Naline Heilbron

A company of passionate people creating luxurious local soaps, body butters and sugar scrubs – with a side of social justice.

— By Amie Watson

Naline Heilbron's eyes sparkle when she talks about her line of all-natural, made-in-Aruba soaps and bath products.

The path to success wasn't an obvious one for the former Aruban national news anchor.

With the help of a loyal and dedicated group of special young ladies with disabilities, she's grown from a one-woman operation to supplying soap to a number of hotels and gift shops on the island.

➤ The inspiration to make soap came to Naline while getting lost in nature on an Indian reserve in Colombia, she says.

There, she started learning about holistic therapies.

"I realized that if I wanted truly natural, chemical-free products for my skin, I'd have to make them myself," she says.

So she took classes and became a certified advanced soap maker. With the help of her mother and nieces she started making small batches of soap.

Her first break came when the managing director of Aruba's largest tour operator offered to help market her soap.

True to his word, he coached her and gave her helpful suggestions.

When the exclusive *Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort* called, she knew she needed to grow, and fast. To keep up with demand, she'd started working late into the night making hundreds of soaps at a time out of wooden soap molds the size of a wine bottle, cutting them by hand to the required size for their guest rooms.

"It takes a minimum of four weeks for the soap to cure the traditional way," says Naline. She doesn't use glycerin and she and her employees hand-cut and wrap each soap individually.

Fortunately, she bumped into a job coach,

specialized in working with people with special needs.

After growing up with a sister with epilepsy, she felt this could be a good opportunity.

"The beauty of positive energy attracts more positive energy. We started with three special young ladies and now we have about 16 team members from different foundations," she says.

What's so special about *Ha'Bon* products? They're a silky smooth mixture of skin-loving oils and butters such as olive oil, coconut oil, shea butter, cocoa butter, avocado oil and jojoba oil and they're infused with sea salts, flowers, herbs and fruit, including papaya from



Photography: Kenneth Thompson



Naline's own backyard. Using *Ha'Bon* soap is like using a soap and lotion in one.

Ha'Bon donates leftover soap to charity foundations and disaster relief organizations, like after Hurricane Irma devastated neighboring St. Maarten. "One hand is meant to help yourself and the other is to help someone else," says Naline.

They sell everything from soap to personalized lotions, luxurious whipped body butters, sugar scrubs and more.

Lotions come in small Mason jars and are whipped like buttercream and topped

with golden encapsulated jojoba micro beads. Hand-shaped bath bombs are sprinkled with colorful sparkling Epsom and Himalayan salt.

All the products are still hand-wrapped and all the packaging is hand-made. Visitors can even try the products and wash their hands in a centerpiece fountain in the middle of the store.

"We measure success not by the products we bring, but by our true core value of environmental stewardship, respect and integrity," says Naline.

To accomplish her goals, her crew needs

continuous guidance. Fortunately, she's surrounded herself with good people, including teachers and experienced coaches from foundations like *Man Na Obra* ('Hands at Work'), one of the organizations on Aruba that helps people with special needs.

"None of us are perfect, but we don't focus on our weaknesses," says Naline. "We just maximize our abilities." ■

HA'BON HANDMADE IN ARUBA
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